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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 CARACAS 000029

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PASS TO AMEMBASSY GRENADA
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PASS TO AMCONSUL QUEBEC
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PASS TO AMCONSUL RECIFE
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2035/01/11

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SUBJECT: Foreign Minister Maduro Protests Alleged Overflights,
Welcomes Dialogue

REF: 10 CARACAS 23; 08 CARACAS 695; 10 CARACAS 3; 09 CARACAS 1587
09 CARACAS 1603

CLASSIFIED BY: Robin D. Meyer, Political Counselor, State, POL;
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. On January 11, Foreign Minister Nicholas Maduro called in Charge Caulfield to deliver a diplomatic note protesting an alleged violation of Venezuelan airspace by a U.S. military aircraft on January 8. Maduro expressed concern that the alleged overflight occurred on the very day that a renewed dialogue had begun between Vice Minister Arias Cardenas and Ambassador Duddy (ref a). Maduro stressed the Venezuelan government's interest in dialogue as a way to maintain peaceful relations. The Charge denied that any violations of Venezuelan airspace had occurred since the May 2008 incident (ref b) and expressed concern about the official media's rebroadcasts of the air traffic recordings from that incident as if it had just occurred. The Charge reiterated U.S. interest in improved bilateral relations based on mutual interests. Maduro had given an identical diplomatic note to the Dutch Ambassador earlier in the day; the Dutch Ambassador had also denied any violation of Venezuelan airspace. The text of the diplomatic note is provided in para 14 below. The fabrication of this latest incident may be an escalation of an effort by Chavez to distract attention from internal problems as national legislative elections approach. The boldness of this deception suggests that Chavez is secure that he can control the media reaching his electoral base. End Summary.

Sudden Spurt of Dialogue

¶2. (C) On Sunday, January 10, the Foreign Minister's Chief of Staff, Temir Porras, called Charge Caulfield to inform him that Foreign Minister Maduro wanted to meet with Ambassador Duddy at noon on January 11. The Charge advised him that the Ambassador had departed earlier in the morning for personal leave and consultations in the United States. The Foreign Ministry's Chief of Protocol called the Charge the morning of January 11 to confirm Maduro's interest in meeting with the Charge at 12:30 p.m.

¶3. (C) After a change in venue to the ornate "Yellow House," used for ceremonial events, and several changes in the appointment time, Maduro met with the Charge, who was accompanied by the

Polcouns (notetaker). Maduro delivered a diplomatic note protesting the alleged violation of Venezuelan airspace on January 18. He noted the "positive" meeting between Ambassador Duddy and Vice Minister Arias Cardenas on January 8 (ref a) and expressed his "surprise" that an incursion by a U.S. military aircraft had occurred on the same day that a bilateral dialogue had been reinitiated. He said President Chavez had publicly denounced the incursion on official media the evening of January 8 in order to alert domestic and international public opinion about the threat. Maduro said the GBRV hoped to avoid this type of "provocative incident."

14. (C) Throughout the meeting, Maduro reiterated the importance he attached to a renewed, "respectful" bilateral dialogue. "Despite our other differences, we need to maintain a dialogue ("punto de encuentro"). (Note: Maduro has not met with Ambassador Duddy since his return in July 2009 despite repeated requests for such a meeting. The Ambassador's meeting with Vice Minister Arias on January 8 was his first meeting with a senior GBRV official in the last six months. End Note.) Maduro said that he had seen the prospect for a different type of bilateral relationship during the OAS Summit in Trinidad, but said that attacks from different elements of the U.S. government had eroded that prospect, citing critical U.S. country reports on counter-narcotics and terrorism. (Note: Maduro stressed that Venezuela had broken its record in the quantity of drugs seized and

CARACAS 00000029 002 OF 004

drug laboratories destroyed during 2009. End Note.)

Few Details on the Alleged Overflight

15. (C) According to Maduro, a U.S. military aircraft entered Venezuelan airspace from Curacao twice and was tracked by Venezuelan radar. Venezuelan F-16s were mobilized to escort the aircraft out of Venezuelan airspace. Maduro said the American pilot had been in contact with Venezuelan air traffic control. (Note: Embassy expects the GBRV will release some air traffic recording as "proof" of this incursion. End Note.) Maduro expressed concern that the only response to President Chavez' allegation on Friday had been an e-mail from Reuters conveying the Pentagon's statement denying the incident.

16. (C) Maduro insisted on the importance of an investigation into this incursion, which he claimed was the work of "interests who are trying to provoke an incident." He said this violation of Venezuelan airspace occurred in a context in which Venezuela found itself surrounded by U.S. military forces in Aruba/Curacao and Colombia and identified as a "threat" by the Pentagon. Maduro claimed the GBRV wanted a peaceful relationship with the United States but had an obligation to be vigilant and to alert domestic and international public opinion about the threat.

Charge Denies Violation, Expresses Need for Improved Dialogue

17. (C) Charge Caulfield stressed that it would have been better for the Foreign Ministry to have called the Embassy in for clarifications before the President publicly denounced the incident on January 8. He told Maduro that the United States had not entered Venezuelan airspace either on January 8 or in May 2009, as previously alleged (ref c). He questioned why the air traffic recording from May 2008 was being rebroadcast on the official media as if it had just occurred.

¶18. (C) Charge highlighted the importance of dialogue for avoiding misunderstanding and reducing tensions. He stressed that the United States had no interest in provoking any incident, noting that both the Forward Operating Location in Aruba/Curacao and U.S. assistance to Colombia represented long-standing arrangements. In response to Maduro's call for a "respectful dialogue," Charge noted that President Obama had never personally attacked President Chavez, as Chavez had done to Obama. However, Charge stressed the need to focus on mutual interests and the opportunity provided by the return of the ambassadors to improve the bilateral dialogue, which would even permit a better understanding of Venezuelan policies, such as those mentioned by Maduro in the area of counter-narcotics.

One More in List of Unfounded Allegations

¶19. (C) This latest allegation follows a series of charges by President Chavez and Vice President Carrizales regarding an alleged UAV flight from Colombia (ref d) and U.S. and Dutch plans to attack Venezuela from Curacao (ref c). It also occurs as the official media continues to rebroadcast the air traffic recording from the May 2008 accidental overflight as if it had just occurred. These allegations occur in a context in which President Chavez has accused Colombia and the United States of planting evidence to create a "false positive" of Venezuelan collaboration with the FARC

CARACAS 00000029 003 OF 004

to justify a U.S. military intervention (ref e).

Official Press Inside, Private Media Outside

¶10. (C) The official media was outside the meeting room for photos at the top of the meeting. The PAO arranged for the private media to be present outside the "Yellow House" after the meeting. The Charge told the press that the United States had not violated Venezuelan airspace, that the recordings being broadcast dated from the May 2008 incident, and that the United States sought improved bilateral relations based on dialogue and mutual interests.

Dutch Treated to Venezuelan Venom

¶11. (C) The Dutch Ambassador told the Charge that he was also called in on January 11 and given an identical diplomatic note protesting the alleged overflight by a U.S. military aircraft departing from Curacao. The Dutch also denied to Maduro that any airspace violation had taken place. (Note: Following his speech in Copenhagen, when President Chavez first accused The Netherlands of complicity with the United States in conspiring to attack Venezuela, the Dutch Ambassador told Ambassador Duddy of his utter surprise at the hostility and mendacity of the GBRV. End Note.)

Comment

¶12. (C) This was the Embassy's first meeting with Foreign Minister Maduro since Charge Caulfield met with him in January ¶2009. Interestingly, it occurred the next working day after Vice Minister Arias Cardenas had met with the Ambassador and had reported positively on that meeting to President Chavez. The

message of interest in improved relations contrasts with the fabrication of this latest airspace violation. It may well be part of a concerted attempt to distract the public from internal problems as elections approach. Maduro's insistence on the January 8 incursion, which has no basis in fact, also suggests the GBRV's confidence in its control of the media reaching its electoral base.

¶13. (C) The DATT has advised that the location where the alleged violation of Venezuelan airspace first occurred is well outside Venezuelan airspace.

Text of Diplomatic Note

¶14. (U) Below is an informal translation of the text of Diplomatic Note DM No. 002 delivered by Foreign Minister Maduro to the Charge on January 11:

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela raises its most energetic protest to the Government of the United States for the two incursions that occurred in Venezuelan airspace on Friday, January 8, 2010, by a U.S. military aircraft departing from Curacao in a direct route between Curacao-Maiquetia at an altitude of 600 to 700 feet above sea level.

CARACAS 00000029 004 OF 004

The first violation took place at 12:55 in the radial 355 from Puerto Cabello and lasted for 15 minutes.

The second violation took place at 13:37 in the same direction and lasted for 25 minutes.

In both cases, the aircraft responsible for this violation only left Venezuelan airspace in a northbound route in the face of imminent interception by F-16 aircraft of the Venezuelan Air Force, which had been alerted by the systems for the protection and defense of territorial sovereignty. This, together with the communications held between the control tower and the intruding aircraft, constitute irrefutable proof that it was an intentional and conscious violation of the airspace of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and removes the possibility of an instrument error.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela condemns the repeated violations of Venezuelan airspace perpetrated by U.S. military aircraft, a situation even more serious than that previously denounced by the Venezuelan government, without obtaining any explanation from the Government of the United States.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela demands that the Government of the United States respect its sacred national sovereignty and that it takes the necessary measures to prevent these incidents from recurring in the future.
CAULFIELD